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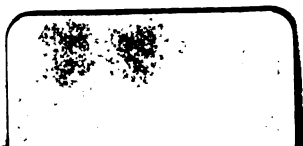


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**HANDEL.**



# H A N D E L :

HIS LIFE

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL.

WITH

THOUGHTS ON SACRED MUSIC.

*A Sketch.*

BY MRS. BRAY,

AUTHOR OF THE "LIFE OF STOTHARD;" "THE BORDERS OF THE TAMAR  
AND THE TAVY;" "THE WHITE HOODS;" "TRELAWNKY," &c. &c.

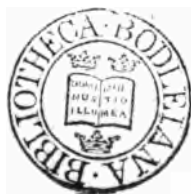
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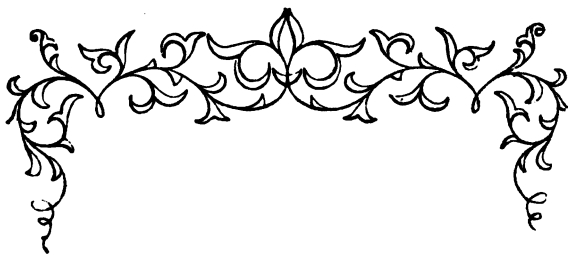
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## H A N D E L.

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### PART I.

**I**MRESSED from an early age with the deepest veneration for the name of Handel, I have long wished to give my own feelings and reflections respecting his character as a man, the progress of his genius, and his all-surpassing works. I am the more induced to attempt a sketch of this nature, because I have so frequently remarked, with surprise, how few appear to know anything more of him than that he was the composer of the Messiah and other celebrated oratorios, whilst with the many struggles, trials, and misfortunes which befel him, more especially towards the latter part of his long and arduous career, they seem to be wholly unacquainted, and know as little that he was excellent no less as a man than as a musician.

This slight acquaintance on the part of the public at large with a life and character so replete with interest as those of Handel, may perhaps arise from the notices of him being principally confined to Biographical Dictionaries, or to works solely on music. The former are books of reference, not of general reading, and the latter are mostly professional; so that I fain would hope a sketch, in a popular form, of this great composer may not altogether be useless or unacceptable to the reader, more especially as I propose giving some little account of the Commemoration held in Westminster Abbey in 1834, at which I had the good fortune to be present.

It was indeed a noble tribute to his memory. Most other distinguished men amongst poets, painters, and sculptors had equals; but the world had never seen but one Handel. In his own class, as a composer of sacred music, till Mendelssohn appeared he stood unapproached, even by a Haydn, a Mozart, or a Beethoven.\* These, so to speak, gained the third heaven, and brought thence the harmony of those regions; but Handel alone reached the seventh, and taught us how far it is possible for the choiring of the "cherubim" and

\* Since the above was written Costa has produced his splendid oratorio of Eli.

"the bright seraphim" to surpass all mortal conceptions save his own, and to awaken in the soul that ecstasy, blended with awe and love and adoration, that leaves the mind not a thought, the heart not an emotion, which is not fixed and absorbed in the "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity."

In attempting the sketch I propose, I shall indeed feel much pleasure, as it is a gratifying task, when, with the triumphs of men of genius, we have to record instances of their private worth, as well as of their public fame. I confess I have ever been disposed to entertain the opinion, that (except in a few, a very few instances which seem contrary to the general laws of nature) great men are good men.

Genius and taste are also so nearly allied, that the observations which apply to the one will, in some measure, be found equally applicable to the other; for if we examine into the principles of true taste, we shall unquestionably find they have their origin in deep feelings. Nothing excellent ever originated in a cold heart. The great, the noble, the generous inventions and discoveries of man, all emanate from a warm spring. The heart is the source of taste, though the head may educate it. And it is this natural propensity to goodness in really great minds which makes the truly great always the truly modest; for the conceptions of

greatness are always beyond its own powers in the execution of them.

Circumstances and the repeated triumphs of success may give to greatness confidence, but its first dawn will ever be marked by modesty ; as the rising of the sun is generally ushered in by a gentle and a blushing light, that steals forward and gradually unfolds itself before it bursts into the effulgence of "the perfect day." How much will these remarks be exemplified in the subject now in view !—it is my apology for introducing them.

George Frederick Handel was born on the 24th of February, 1684, at Halle, in the Duchy of Magdeburg, in Upper Saxony. He was the son of an aged physician, who intended him for the law. The Doctor soon observed, before the child was six years old, the strong propensity he evinced for music ; and fearing it would grow upon him, and lead him away from the less inviting studies designed for him, he forbade the boy, on pain of his utmost displeasure, to touch any musical instrument, or to entertain the least thought of music, even as an amusement. We may fancy how awfully shook the old Doctor's periwig, and how the gold headed-cane was uplifted, as this angry denunciation was given forth.

But so ardent was the child's love of his darling

pursuit, that under all this discouragement, and in spite of all pains and penalties annexed to disobedience, he contrived to steal from his bed and spent a considerable part of the night in practising, in his own self-taught manner, on an old clavicord which stood in a garret in a remote part of the house.\*

The father of Handel had a son by his first wife, who was at this period in the service of the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels, most probably as a page. Dr. Handel was about leaving home to visit this son, when little George, who was an affectionate child, and dearly loved his elder brother, begged hard to be permitted to go and see him. On being somewhat peremptorily refused, he still persisted; and followed the carriage with such earnest entreaty and so many tears, that at length his father relented and took him up. This was a fortunate circumstance, as the visit to the palace of the Duke determined his future course.

Soon after his arrival at the court, George found

\* It is not a little remarkable, that Dr. Arne (for simplicity, airiness, and sweetness, the most delightful of the English composers of his day) was designed by his father for the law; and forbidden to indulge his genius for music. Nevertheless, he contrived to teach himself on an old spinnet, which he managed, with the connivance of a servant, to get conveyed into an attic, where he practised upon it, after first muffling the strings. See Hawkins and Burney's "*History of Music*."

his way to the harpsichord in the concert-room ; and being unproved for such intrusion, he grew bolder, and one day contrived, immediately after the performance of divine service, to steal unperceived to the organ in the chapel. The Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels had not yet departed. On hearing a remarkably soft and sweet strain, with something rather unusual in the style of the player, the Duke turned to his attendants, and asked if any one could tell who it was touched the organ with such peculiar sweetness. "It is my little brother George," replied Dr. Handel's eldest son ; "he is not yet eight years old." It would be needless to say what was the astonishment of the Duke, or the impression made on his mind by so extraordinary a child : the result soon appeared. He showed his good sense by exerting himself to overcome the perverse notions of the boy's father, who, because the civil law was a good profession, would make little George a lawyer, in defiance of the most marked indications of his genius.

But the prejudices of Dr. Handel were obstinate, and, with that blindness which sometimes makes relatives and friends the chief obstructors of the most promising talents, by a cold denial of all aid to remove any impediments that lie in the way, nothing less than the influence of a man of sense in

the person of a prince, in all probability would have induced this votary of Apollo, in respect to physic, to allow his gifted son to become such in respect to music.

At length he relaxed in the severity of his determination; the law scheme was given up, and on his return to Halle, George had the infinite delight of finding himself placed under the regular tuition of an excellent master, and that he was to receive an education in conformity with his genius; and that music in due time was to be his profession.

The decision was equally prudent and just; and Handel is a striking instance of the wisdom (which the Jesuits formed into a system) of not educating every one alike, but to study the talents, the natural propensity, and character of each. The wondrous effects produced by this system of instruction in art, science, and literature, in the institution of Loyola, are too well known to be here particularized.

Fortunately for Handel, Frederick Zachau, organist to the Cathedral of Halle, was not only an excellent musician, but one capable of entering into the feelings and estimating the genius of his marvellously gifted pupil. He commenced his instructions by giving him a thorough knowledge of the general principles of music and some of the works of the greatest masters. Even at this early period,



the boy was struck with admiration at hearing the hymns of Luther, who was the only composer he ever imitated.

Handel now commenced with enthusiasm the regular and arduous study of that science he was destined to raise to a degree of excellence it had never before attained. So unremitting was his application, that it required all the united authority of the father and the physician to induce him to allow himself such relaxation and exercise as, at his tender age, could alone preserve him in health.

Handel is another proof how erroneous is the common opinion, that genius is naturally indolent and capricious, and will not submit to the trammels of application. Some there are who, possessed of a certain degree of showy ability, are fond of excusing their own idleness by taking to themselves the credit of great natural talent, and would fain persuade others they could do wondrous things, but for the unhappy accompaniment of superior genius, namely its impatience of study. Nothing can be more false; for there is hardly a single example of a person truly great in art, science, or literature, who has not been as much distinguished by extraordinary industry as by extraordinary genius; and very often the full development of their powers has been the result of the most strenuous application. God

forms the diamond, but man must work upon it, ere it can give forth its full lustre.

It seems that the rapid progress of the youthful musician, in regard to his execution on various instruments, kept pace with his studies in principle and composition; since during the first two years he frequently assisted his master by officiating for him on the organ, in the Cathedral; whilst with an unexampled precocity of talent and industry, though but in his ninth year, he composed several motets for the church, and produced a new service weekly, during the next three years. He also composed many fugues, and a whole set of sonatas.\*

Handel, however, though so advanced beyond his years, and so highly appreciated, was never forced before the public at large as a remarkable child. He was permitted to follow his studies sedulously and in comparative privacy. No public parade of precocious talent either drew upon him an intoxicating praise, or made him careless, by too early success, in the attainment of that excellence which must ultimately deserve and fix it. His youthful modesty was never tempted by too early competi-

\* A copy of the sonatas was in the possession of King George the Third. Some years ago, they were examined by an eminent professor of music, who declared that several passages in these works, produced at so early an age, were distinguished by fine harmony and modulation.

tion for fame; he escaped therefore conceit and affectation, and remained a simple and a natural character through life.

At length, finding he had gained as much instruction as he could hope to derive from his worthy master at Halle, about the year 1698 he visited Berlin, at that time celebrated in the musical world for the superiority of its Opera, under the management of two Italian composers, Attilio and Bononcini. In this city Handel first became really distinguished as so wonderful a performer on the organ, and as so fertile a genius for composition, that the Elector of Brandenburg (afterwards the sovereign of Prussia) offered to send him into Italy at his own expense to complete his studies, and afterwards to retain him in his service. The offer was refused, nor do the various accounts of Handel agree as to the cause. One of them ascribes it to a spirit of independence on the part of his father; whilst another seems to imply that some reasons connected with Attilio and Bononcini were the cause. If so, it was most probably a circumstance that did them no credit; since, many years after, as we shall presently see, these men combined together to injure Handel, as far as they had the power to do so, in his feelings, his fortune, and his popularity; his fame was beyond their reach. It is not improbable, there-

fore, that the germ of their bitter envy first showed itself at Berlin, in consequence of the marked favour of the Elector towards the youthful wonder of Halle.

Envy, the common vice of mediocrity of every description, cannot endure to leave unassailed the superiority of a rival, which throws its pretensions completely into the shade. But never is it so bitter as when it lives and moves in close contact with the favoured individual. The mind possessed by envy then sees in the honours and rewards lavished on him, that which it cannot hope to attain, and likes not to see bestowed on another; hence the envious speedily become the malevolent.

Whatever might have been the cause, Handel declined the favour of the Elector, and left Berlin; and by what so soon after followed, it does not seem that any very affluent or even independent prospects, unconnected with his own talents, could have influenced him. He now returned to Halle. It was at this period he first formed the most intimate friendship of his youth—that with Telemann, who was afterwards known as one of the most celebrated German composers of his day.

With the young and the warm-hearted, friendship is a plant of ready growth, demanding little more than a similarity of taste or pursuit, a willingness

to please, and an interchange of acts of kindness, that foster all good feelings, and give rise to none that can offend. Such is the general character of friendship in early life. But when to this is added the strong sympathy arising from kindred genius and similarity of circumstances (unclouded by envy, and free from all the clashing of rival interests), how strong is the bond! And by characteristics such as these was the friendship of Handel and Telemann distinguished.

Both were gifted with genius, of a remarkable order, for Music; both were opposed by parents in the early and longing desire of their souls to become the votaries of that science, and both were destined to overcome all opposition, all difficulties, and finally to rise to honour and eminence in the course for which, it cannot be doubted, a good Providence had ordained them; and to which it certainly led them by the most marked interference in the direction of circumstances, to work out its own beneficial ends. Telemann's history is so remarkable an instance of this, at least in the outset, that when we consider, also, he was the youthful and most intimate friend of Handel, it needs no apology for mentioning here a few curious and interesting anecdotes concerning him. He wrote his own Memoirs.

From these we learn, that he, as well as Handel, was born in the Duchy of Magdeburg; he was about the same age. Whilst at school he displayed an ardent fondness for music, and, though contrary to the wishes of his parents, made so great a progress, that he could not only play on various instruments, but before he was twelve years old attempted the composition of an opera. His father died, and (another coincidence with Handel's early life) his mother destined him for the practice of the law; and, in order to forward his studies for the profession, insisted that he should set out for the University of Leipsic, exacting from him, ere he did so, a solemn promise that he would altogether renounce the practice and pursuit of music! This was a bitter exaction, but, as he tells his readers, he loved and revered his mother; so that he not only gave the promise thus required of him, but, in order to render it more imperative, gave to it something of the character of a sacrifice, by committing to the flames all that he could collect together of his musical compositions.

No doubt the good mother fancied she had fulfilled her duty to her son, when she thus, as far as in her lay, extinguished in him those ardent promptings of nature, which the divine source whence they sprung should have rendered sacred. How often

do we see this error!—how much is it to be deplored! I have myself seen two or three instances, in the course of my life, where genius of a very high order, that with due care and cultivation could not have failed to attain excellence, has been completely damped and rendered unavailing by the coldness, the prejudices, the opposition of friends; whilst the unfortunate beings so opposed in the course for which nature had endowed them, like plants placed in an uncongenial soil, have never thriven in after-life, or, at the best, have gone on their way mourning, cherishing with bitterness secret regrets for lost opportunities, and for having let slip that “tide in their affairs,” which, as Shakspeare says, if “taken at the flood,” would have led them on “to fortune.” None but those who have experienced it can tell the incalculable injury and disappointment arising from the interference of an injudicious friend in early life.

Telemann, in his way to Leipsic, remained for some little time in Halle, where he first became acquainted with Handel, from whom he declares he imbibed so much of the “strong poison” of music as nearly to upset all his resolutions. However, his mother’s influence and the solemn promise he had given her prevailed, and at length, tearing himself away from the fascinations of

Handel and his art, he reached Leipsic, with the determination to become a lawyer. But his musical genius seemed still to hover round him, and to conduct him where occasion should be found to keep from total extinction the flame which burnt within his breast. Chancing to lodge in a house where he constantly heard both vocal and instrumental music, though much inferior to his own, the temptation to return to his old favourite pursuit was almost too strong for resistance, and he still indulged the forlorn hope he might one day be a musician.

Fortunately for Telemann, at the time he committed to the flames his musical compositions, one piece had escaped destruction—it was a psalm. This was now accidentally found among his papers, by a fellow student and intimate friend. He requested Telemann to let him have it; and, on receiving it, carried it to the church of St. Thomas, where he had interest enough to get it performed. A burgomaster present, a better judge of music than such worthies are generally supposed to be, was so struck with the fine harmony of this psalm, that he made some inquiry about the composer; and, on learning who it was, directed that Telemann should be employed to compose something of a similar kind for the church every fortnight, pro-



mising a lucrative payment, and rewarding him handsomely for what he had already done.

At this critical moment he received a remittance from his mother, on whom he was wholly dependent for his support. He acknowledged her kindness, made her acquainted with the prosperous state of his finances, and the cause, and returning the remittance, of which he assured her, under present circumstances, he stood in no need, implored her to relent a little in her determination against his study of music.

Aged persons of common minds, however slow they may be to apprehend the golden results of a profession for which the young at the outset can have no assurance of success but in their own genius and aptitude to bring it into play, are quick-sighted enough as to the prudence of cultivating it when it comes before them with the substantial plea of money already gained. So was it with the mother of Telemann; the returned remittance decided his fate; the old lady withdrew her injunction, and, instead of her ban, sent her blessing to help on her son in the labours of his favourite pursuit. On receiving this Telemann says, with a delight that showed the goodness of his heart in so dutifully appreciating a mother's blessing, "And now I was again half a musician."

Soon after this, he was regularly established as director of the Opera at Leipsic, and organist and composer for the church. Once more with increased satisfaction he renewed his friendship with Handel; they regularly corresponded, and frequently met; and it was during this period, when Telemann was twenty years old, and Handel but sixteen, that they advised and encouraged each other in their respective studies and compositions.

Early in the year 1708, Handel had the misfortune to lose his aged and respected father. The old doctor died poor, and left his widow but in narrow circumstances. Never ought it to be forgotten, and to the honour of his memory be it spoken, that no sooner was his father dead, than the son determined he would never deprive his mother of any portion of her limited income by remaining dependent upon her means. At the time the resolution was formed, he was still a youth not nineteen years old; and having refused the munificent offers of the Elector, and left Berlin, he could not very well seek for aid or expect it from that quarter; and he, as yet, had found no other powerful patron. Under all circumstances, Handel must have had many difficulties and much inexperience to contend with in this early determination to launch the little bark of his

youthful fortunes, unassisted, on the voyage of life. But the motive was good, and, we cannot doubt a resolution so virtuously formed would be assisted with God's blessing; and so it was, since from that time every step he took, and every move he made, seemed but as a link added to a link in that great chain of circumstances which (though not without trials and afflictions) led him on to the achievements of his genius, and to ever-enduring fame.

In 1703 Handel took leave of his mother, and went to Hamburg, where he found the Opera, then under the conduct of Rheinhard Keiser, a German master of music, in a most prosperous state. Here he commenced humbly—playing in the orchestra nothing more than a *Ripieno violin*. Mattheson, an opera singer, composer, and author, the friend and associate of Handel at Hamburg, says of him (though I confess I do not understand his meaning), that when he played this Ripieno violin, "he behaved as if he could not count five, being naturally inclined to dry humour."

Handel, however, did not long remain in obscurity; and soon did his uncommon abilities excite no small degree of envy and jealousy among those around him. It has often been a cause of regret with several of the most worthy in the musical

world, that no profession is more prone to the indulgence of the baneful feelings of envy and malice than their own. Perhaps as there are so many good vocal and instrumental performers, and so few really good composers, the necessity of immediate success with the former, and the transitory nature of that success when gained, may be the cause wherefore, in some instances, they are impatient of any one likely to rise into a higher degree of notice than themselves.

Envy in Handel's case nearly cost him his life; for having been appointed to take the harpsichord, as leader in the orchestra, in the absence of Keiser, the conductor (a post which Mattheson had with much anxiety, but in vain, struggled to obtain), the passions of the latter were roused to so violent a degree that he determined on revenge. Mattheson was a vain youth, and in the present instance thought himself slighted for one far his inferior. It appears that a rencounter took place between the rival parties; but no portion of Handel's early history has been so variously represented by his biographers. One describes it as a duel with swords; another, as nothing less than an attempt at assassination; whilst more that one declares Handel's life was saved by a musical shield, in the shape of a

common music score, which he happened to carry about him under his coat; this completely parried a thrust, which would otherwise have dispatched him. But in stating this discrepancy, it is but fair to give what the incensed rival, Mattheson, himself says in his Autobiography on the subject; for though a vain man, as he was considered an author worthy of credit, his statement may, after all, be the most correct, and it is certainly the least atrocious and bloodthirsty version of the story.

Mattheson begins then by complaining that he has been greatly misrepresented in respect to the nature of the quarrel in question; and goes on by stating that he was the composer of an opera called *Cleopatra*, in which he was accustomed to perform the part of Antony himself. But the death of Antony occurring in an early part of the performance, it seems it was the custom of the defunct hero to reappear again before the audience in his own proper character as the composer of the piece, and so to take his station at the harpsichord till the end of the opera. Now it so happened that on the performance of *Cleopatra* (when Handel was officiating as leader in the absence of Keiser), the defunct Antony came as usual to claim his place in the orchestra. But Handel, neither heeding his

claims nor his vanity, positively refused to give the instrument up to him. This led to so furious a quarrel, that on quitting the theatre, Mattheson admits, he gave his rival a slap in the face. Swords were instantly drawn, and a rencounter ensued; but Handel's guardian spirit interposed—the sword of the enraged Antony broke against a button of his opponent's coat. Handel's life was saved, and soon after these incensed enemies shook hands, and became better friends than they ever were before.

According to most accounts, this fracas, though it could have nothing to do with his talents, caused Handel to become an object of so much curiosity and notoriety in Hamburg, that it greatly forwarded his success; so that in a short time he had bestowed upon him the appointment of composer to the Opera; and whilst he held that post (a great distinction for one so young), he produced his *Almeria*, *Florinda*, and *Nerone*; all of which had a great run. It is not however my intention, in a sketch such as this, to follow up in regular succession the progress of Handel in the composition of his works. I shall here, therefore, merely state that, having whilst at Hamburg gained a sum of money sufficient for the purpose, he determined to travel into Italy, in order to enlarge his knowledge, and more especially to

improve his taste, by becoming acquainted with the delicacy and sweetness of the music of that country ; as though he equalled, if not surpassed, all his contemporaries in harmony and modulation, yet he felt that he was wanting in refinement and grace.



## PART II.

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THE first city in which Handel made any stay was Florence. He was there well received and much encouraged by the Grand Duke Giovanni de Medici; and speedily produced his opera of Roderigo, the excellence of which was universally acknowledged, and rewarded by his noble patron by the gift of a hundred sequins and a service of plate. In this city he appears to have advanced the great object of his journey with astonishing facility; as the airs he composed for Roderigo were, at the time, deemed to be almost unrivalled in grace and sweetness.

When we reflect on the interest of the place in which he was located, it may in a great measure enable us to comprehend this rapid progress; for may we not ascribe to its peculiar merits much of the improvement of the young composer? It cannot for a moment be doubted, that a mind such as Handel possessed must have been feelingly alive to



all that was soul-inspiring in nature and in art. Florence, in the simple grandeur of its Tuscan architecture the most beautiful of cities, seated in the midst of fertile plains, and girded by distant mountains, watered by the Arno, and possessed of the choicest treasures of statuary and painting, by the greatest masters the world ever saw,—enriched by the associations of history and poetry,—the birth-place of the most famous of the Medici, of Dante, of Michael Angelo,—the scene of some of the most romantic adventures in Italian story ;—what soul, such as Handel's, could breathe even the very air of Florence, and not feel the inspiration of sights, and objects, and recollections, and associations, such as these ? They were all of a nature as enchanting, as softening, and as delicate, as the brilliant skies and the balmy climate that rendered it as a city of the blest. And all this was calculated to add to the bold, the majestic, but somewhat rude strength of his compositions, the graces of a refined taste in that flow of "lengthened sweetness long drawn out," in which his works had hitherto been wanting. We can imagine such a composition as "The Horse and his Rider," or the "Hallelujah Chorus," to be the result of his own Northern genius, in all its native force, uncontrolled by ordinary laws, and soaring above them. But such strains as "There

were Shepherds abiding in the Fields," or the "Hush, ye pretty warbling Choir," we can imagine may be traced in their origin to the inspiration of Italian taste imbibed amid the vine and the olive groves of Florence, on the banks of the "softly flowing" Arno.

Handel next visited Venice, where music seemed to be so completely in character with her water-bound population and her "moonlight sea," as a modern poet expresses it, that the very gondoliers, as they glided along its glossy surface, made

" Their voices keep tune,  
As their oars keep time,"

to many a canto of the *Gierusalemme Liberata* of Tasso.

Here Handel (probably during the Carnival) appeared at a masquerade, where the celebrated musician, Scarlatti, happened to be present. Still wearing his vizor, the young German sat down to the harpsichord in the principal apartment occupied by the company assembled, and performed in so astonishing a manner that every one was arrested by a power of harmony and a brilliancy of execution they had never before heard equalled on that instrument. At length the delighted Scarlatti exclaimed, "It must be the famous Saxon or the devil." Thus in

Venice we find, as in England, the devil sometimes has the honour of having ascribed to him that which is so excellent in its kind, as to excite wonder no less than admiration.

At Venice Handel made a great advance both in composition and in fame; for it was here he produced his celebrated opera of *Agrippina*, which had such an extraordinary success that it was performed thirty nights in succession; and the composer was sought after and treated with distinction by the nobles of the city, as well as by the musical world. In this opera, wind-instruments, such as horns, flutes, &c., were by Handel's own adventurous genius first combined with the human voice. High as his fame had already risen, it was not without much murmuring and criticism that such an innovation was brought about.

Some say it was at Venice, and others at Florence, where Vittoria, a most beautiful woman, the favourite of the Grand Duke, who sang with the utmost sweetness in Handel's operas, was so charmed by the handsome person of the young German (and in youth he was one of the most handsome men of his time) that she fell desperately in love with him. Nor does it seem probable that he could have been ignorant of a passion that attracted much general observation. But in no

manner did he respond to it, and, in spite of all the combined fascinations of talent and beauty, remained perfectly "fancy free." This indifference was the more creditable to Handel, as, from all accounts, the Italian Opera was not in his day so respectable as it has become in our own. There were few then who in private life united with great genius the dignity and propriety of a Catalani, the character and rank of a Sontag, or the bewitching modesty of a Jenny Lind. It may also be observed that Handel had a regular and engrossing pursuit. Idleness, or that kind of half-employment which engages the hands and even the head, but in which the heart takes no interest, fails to keep aloof carking care; and if discontent and repining step in, there is a want of peace, "the central feeling of all happiness," so that what is wrong is too frequently welcomed from a mere weariness of life. It is a remark of Dr. Johnson, "that whatever busies the mind, without corrupting it, has at least this use—it rescues the day from idleness; and he that is never idle will not often be vicious." If this may be said even of the most ordinary employments, how great must be the benefit to the individual himself, where the object he has in view, be it in art, science, or literature, is one noble in its aim and useful in its end! But to return to the subject.

Italy had indeed done honour to the German Apollo, and he was induced to proceed on to the most ancient and celebrated of all its cities—Rome. Thither had his fame gone before him; so that he found all the world there prepared to do homage to that genius which had been already consecrated by success.

At Rome he was peculiarly fortunate in gaining the favour and esteem of Cardinal Ottoboni, a man of the finest taste in art and literature, and at whose palace he had the opportunity of associating with men of celebrity of every description. It was there he became acquainted with Corelli, whose gentleness and amiability caused him to be held in as much estimation for the excellence of his disposition as for his talents. He it was of whom violinists spoke with so much respect, for the great improvement he introduced in the stringed instrumental music of the orchestra.

It was at Cardinal Ottoboni's concerts that Handel produced his *Trionfo del Tempo*, the words of which were written for him by another cardinal; and at Rome he may be considered to have brought out his first sacred composition of any extent. It was an oratorio, *La Resurrezione*. This was heard with the highest satisfaction, and greatly commended by musicians and amateurs. He had

but just attained his twentieth year; and it is not improbable this work might have suggested to him, in after-life, that unrivalled production *The Messiah*.\*

Whilst Cardinal Ottoboni took so warm an interest in Handel's worldly concerns, he felt one no less strong for his spiritual; and, with much zeal, attempted his conversion to the Church of Rome. But Handel was of a mind too firm to be easily shaken in any matter of importance which he had once adopted on principle or conviction. He resisted all the Cardinal's efforts, and, with that openness and manly candour which characterized him throughout life, declared his resolution to adhere to the Reformed Church, in which he had been born and reared, and in which he said he would die. This refusal, though it doubtless pained

\* It would be curious and interesting to compare the *first* with the *last* oratorio of Handel. If the score of *La Resurrezione* is still in existence, possibly it was incorporated in the *thirty-six* volumes, folio edition, of Handel's works, edited by Dr. Arnold in 1784, which was brought out with great labour and care, soon after the first grand festival in Westminster Abbey. Dr. Arnold, also, after the success of his "*Prodigal Son*," produced an oratorio called the "*Resurrection*." It is not now much known that the Doctor composed one called "*Elijah*," in which the celebrated Madame Mara was the principal performer. Within these few years, we have heard in England Mendelssohn's *Elijah*—a work so admirable and so much in the school of Handel, that we sometimes could have fancied it was his own.

the well-meaning Cardinal, did not in any way shake his esteem for Handel, as he evinced the same kind and friendly feelings for him to the last day of his stay in Rome.

Naples was our composer's next station, where he was also received with every mark of admiration and respect, and where his great and various powers were repeatedly called out for the delight of the court and the public at large. His most remarkable composition at Naples was his *Acis and Galatea*; the words were Italian. In the music, it was totally different from a later work of his bearing the same name; of which, in regard to the poetry, Pope and Arbuthnot were said by some to be the authors; but it seems more probable they were by Gay.

Satisfied with what he had seen of Italy; and most probably finding that he had already gained all that he needed from the refined grace and delicacy of Italian music, he began to look towards his own country, and in 1709 returned to Germany. Handel now visited Hanover, in the Elector of which (afterwards King George the First) he found a munificent patron. It was here that he became acquainted with the principal court musician, named Steffani, an aged man, to whom he was much indebted for an introduction to the family of the Elector, and from any other valuable acts of kind-

ness ; among them, for resigning to him the office of *Capel Meister*. But neither the kindness of Steffani, nor the improvement which the young composer declared he made under this eminent master in what were then called *chamber duetts*, nor his growing favour with the Elector, could detain Handel from a purpose prompted by duty and affection, which did honour to the best feelings of his heart, namely that of hastening to Halle to visit his mother, now old and afflicted with one of the greatest calamities that can befall a human being—the total loss of sight.

It is pleasing to think the consolation she must have derived from this visit. To find the son, who left her from motives of filial piety (because he would not by dependence lessen her small income on the death of his father), now returning to his home prosperous and happy, as the result of those exertions which had followed his self-banishment from his native town, honoured as much for his character as for his genius. His worth, like gold, had come out but the purer for the fiery trial it had undergone ; for such is great success in early youth. His faith unshaken, though assailed at Rome by high authority and by the persuasive acts of friendship, which ever warms a young breast to a sense of gratitude, more especially where kindness is



bestowed by an elder in years and a superior in rank. How gratifying must all this have been to a mother's heart!

Handel's old master Zachau was still alive, and was not forgotten. With what delight must he have heard related the honours paid to his celebrated pupil in a foreign land; the rival, too, of Germany in music! With what satisfaction must he now have remembered the labours he had so honestly bestowed on the child Handel, to train him as a musician in the way he should go, and to make him, as far as in him lay, a good youth. This meeting with his poor old blind mother and his aged master at Halle, and recounting to them his adventures during his six years' travels in Italy, would have been a subject for a picture of which Stothard would have made something; for no painter ever exceeded him in giving the appropriate sentiment to a scene which depended little on action, but all on feeling.

It is not my intention to follow up with regular dates and entries an account of all the works and every minor circumstance connected with the progress of our composer. A full statement of such matters may be found in most Biographical Dictionaries, both English and foreign. I wish rather to speak generally of such things—and more particularly

of his character as a man—and of those great events which, in his after life, raised him to the highest honours, and were the means of giving him to England, where he composed all his greatest works, and where, notwithstanding many trials and misfortunes, he lived and died in universal estimation. Suffice it then to say of his connexion with the Elector of Hanover, that he confirmed Handel's appointment as *Capel Meister*, on a salary of fifteen hundred crowns per annum; acceded to his wish to be permitted to renew his professional travels, on the condition that at the expiration of twelve months he would return to the court of his patron. On leaving Hanover, Handel visited for a short time the Elector Palatine at Dusseldorf. He also wished to retain the young musician in his service; and, though he declined the honour, on taking leave presented him with a magnificent service of plate.

About the year 1710 Handel first set foot on English ground. The Italian Opera, so much censured by Addison in the Spectator, was then rising into considerable notice. Hitherto its progress had been slow in this country; for the first Italian Opera ever performed in England was during the reign of Charles the Second, when, except by the court, it met with universal disappro-

bation.\* Soon after his arrival, Handel was employed by Aaron Hill, then manager of the Opera House, to compose the music of "*Rinaldo*," a dramatic composition founded on the "*Gierusalemme Liberata* of Tasso.

The words were by Rossi, who in his preface made many apologies for them, pleading the usual excuse for a weak production, the haste in which it was written, for the greater accommodation of *il Signor Handel Orfeo del nostro secolo*. The music of this opera justified the highly raised expectations of the fashionable world, the amateurs and the professors of the science, of all kinds and degrees.

By all accounts, whether written or traditionary, nothing in our own times ever exceeded the interest with which the first night of the performance of "*Rinaldo*" was expected, or the enthusiasm and acclamation with which a repetition of the opera was greeted from all parts of the house. Nicolini and Valentini, both famous in their day, and the first Italian singers who ever appeared on the boards of a theatre in England, sustained the principal parts, and Handel himself led the orchestra. From the year 1711, when this opera was brought out, to 1731, a period of no less

\* Evelyn states in his Diary, under "1673-4, 5th January. I saw an Italian Opera in music, the first that had been in England of this kind."

than twenty-one years, it was never performed but to a full house. Yet at this day, I doubt if more than one single air in it is known to the public, and that by its being introduced into Gay's severe satire on the high life and the low life of his own day—*The Beggar's Opera*. From a very early copy of the music of that celebrated work, which chance threw into my possession not long since, I find that the chorus of the highwaymen who are about setting off for Hounslow Heath, "*Let us take to the Road*," is adapted to the air of a march in "*Rinaldo*." Nothing can be more animating: it gives a high idea of the merit of the opera whence such music was taken, and that it deserved all its fame.\*

After remaining the year granted by the Elector, Handel returned to Hanover, but not till he had promised his many powerful and enthusiastic friends and admirers in England that he would come to

\* Many were under the impression that the public generally understood the music of the *Beggar's Opera* was principally selected from English airs of the time of its production. When I first heard the chorus alluded to above, I was so struck with the beauty of it, that I exclaimed, "I should have thought that to be one of *Mozart's* choruses, had Mozart been in existence at the time this opera was brought out." It was indeed by a kindred spirit in animated operatic composition; but so *unlike* the usual style of *Handel*, that, beautiful as it is, I was surprised when some time after I found it to be his.

them again as soon as he could renew his leave of absence from the Elector. On his arrival, he was kindly welcomed by his patron, and more especially noticed by the talented and amiable Princess Caroline (afterwards Queen of England), for whom he composed a set of chamber duetts, that were highly commended for their originality and sweetness.

Once more he obtained permission to revisit England; and, soon after his arrival, received the commands of Queen Anne (who had honoured him with her favourable notice in his previous visit) to compose a *Te Deum* and a *Jubilate* on the grand national occasion then about to take place—that of a public thanksgiving for the peace of Utrecht. Though much jealousy had been manifested on the part of the English composers of the day, yet the compositions of Handel so completely justified the Queen's choice, nothing in sacred music having yet been produced which for grandeur or sublimity could at all compete with them, that even envy was silenced and no more murmuring was heard. These works were performed in the cathedral church of St. Paul, London, in the presence of the Queen, the ministry, the court, and all the noblest in birth, beauty, and genius in the land. Handel presided at the organ, an instrument on which, at that period, he was unrivalled; whilst the

voices of a choir composed of some of the finest that could be selected in sacred song, filled the whole building, and echoed through the lofty dome with a devotional sublimity never before heard in England.

The Queen—to her praise be it spoken—gave Handel a solid proof of royal approbation, by granting him a pension of two hundred pounds per annum for life. It is the nature of success, like capital in money, that it carries with it the power to produce more; and thus was it with Handel. His compositions for St. Paul's had, so to express it, brought him in contact with the nation on an occasion strictly national. Before he was the idol of a class, now he was the favourite of the people; and so much was he employed and engaged in every possible manner in which his genius could be called into action, that he had scarcely an hour for recreation or leisure; and true it is, he delighted in his work. It is probable the many engagements into which he entered at this period made him a little unmindful of the lapse of time, as he forgot to return to Hanover at the stipulated period, and grievously offended the Elector. Some have fancied that the German Prince, in addition to the displeasure he felt at Handel's want of punctuality, was highly incensed at his having composed the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate*

for the peace of Utrecht—a peace that was not in accordance with his Highness's views or wishes.

Be this as it may, Queen Anne died soon after ; and notwithstanding all the good offices of Baron Kilmansegge, Handel's friend, and a favourite with his royal master, he found himself in a very awkward and unfavourable position, when the patron he had neglected in the person of the Elector came to England, as George the First, its king ; and came also with a determined anger against him. Certainly no one who turns to the annals of his Majesty's reign, and reads the accounts of the obdurate manner in which he sanctioned and insisted upon the beheading, hanging, drawing, and quartering the vanquished and unfortunate partizans of the Pretender, will ever accuse King George the First, any more than King George the Second, of having at all too much of the weakness of forgiveness about him. Handel, in respect to court favour, seemed in a desperate case.

Much was the King irritated against him ; and now it was that he, like David, when the dark spirit came over Saul, had recourse to the power of his own celestial harmony to appease him ; for he contrived, on the Prince making an excursion down the Thames, that he should be surprised by the performance of the *Water Music*, which he expressly

composed for the occasion. The device succeeded ; for the King was so effectually soothed by the melody of Handel's strains, as they floated over the waters, that he not only became perfectly reconciled to the composer, but, adding bounty to forgiveness, gave him two hundred pounds a year in augmentation of that pension bestowed on him by the late Queen, thus at once conferring not merely a competency but affluence on our great composer.

During the first year of George the First's reign, Handel seems to have been almost exclusively engaged at the court ; but from 1715 to 1720, he devoted all his powers for the service of the Earl of Burlington and the Duke of Chandos ; with the former he lived for three years at his house in Piccadilly ; with the latter for two years at his princely residence of Cannons. From these circumstances we may very fairly conclude, that the rebellion which broke out in 1715, in favour of the house of Stuart, and the many political parties that divided the realm, and kept the great body of the people in perpetual agitation, altogether had a depressing influence on the fine arts, and the fascinating enjoyment arising from music. In fact, the King and the nobility had something else to do than to attend to concerts and patronise new operas ; and Handel composed none that were performed during this period.



Whilst he resided at Burlington House, he seems to have been amply consoled for this want of public employment, and to have passed his time most agreeably. The Earl, a man of exquisite taste in the fine arts, and a liberal patron of merit, assembled round him all the most distinguished men of talent and eminence of his day. Handel's mornings were devoted to study and composition; at dinner he joined the family, where, in company with such wits, poets, and painters, as Gay, Pope, Arbuthnot, Kneller, and others, he delighted to indulge his social feelings; whilst his good sense, his aptitude for ready reply, and above all his admirable turn for dry humour, made him a most welcome guest.

At Burlington House he wrote (though not acted till some years after) his operas of "*Amadis*," "*Theseus*," and the beautiful "*Pastor Fido*." His next remove to Cannons opened a new field for his genius. The Duke of Chandos had there erected a chapel of the most superb kind, and proposed to Handel (no doubt the offer was one of a munificent description) that he should compose for his chapel: the Duke having there established a regular choir of the first order, and having the service daily performed as in a cathedral, and in the same style.

At Cannons, without any distraction of mind to any other object, Handel enjoyed the opportunity of

giving up his whole soul to the composition of that which called forth the great characteristics of his mighty genius—sacred music; for here he composed many of his most beautiful anthems, besides a multitude of other works. Of the latter, one must not be passed in silence.

Whilst he resided at Burlington House, he became intimate with the poet Gay, who wrote for him the words of *Acis and Galatea*; but not till he was settled at Cannons did he compose the music for them. Of this neither before nor since has there been altogether anything of a similar nature produced; its character is purely original. The chorus of

“Behold the monster Polypheme,”

so wonderfully expressive of terror, I have always fancied as something akin in power to what we read in Grecian history of the effects produced by the chorus of furies at the performance of one of the tragedies of Æschylus. And never was there an air more widely known, or that delighted more every hearer, than the

“Hush, ye pretty warbling choir:”

every organist who wants to show the sweetness of the flute-stop of his organ plays it; every flute-player selects it; and every lady who has a melli-

fluous treble, and a warbling flexibility in her shake, makes it her choicest song. The sweetness, the melody of this celebrated cantata is such, that we might fancy it was composed by the minstrel spirit of a fairy land; so diversified was the genius of Handel. Like Shakspeare, he was the great master of sublimity, and, like him also, no less unrivalled in those light, airy, and delicate touches which appeal to our finer senses as things scarcely of earth.

The first attempt at rebellion having been quelled by the discomfiture of the rebels in 1715, and the spirit of Jacobinism for a while laid to rest by the terrors of the axe and the gibbet, the lovers of harmony in the higher ranks began once more to think of music, and to wish for a permanent improvement of the science in this country. To effect this, some among the nobility and the chief leaders of fashion proposed the establishment of a Music Academy; and for such a purpose obtained subscriptions to the amount of fifty thousand pounds, towards which King George the First gave one thousand. Handel was solicited to be the composer and director of the new establishment; he willingly acceded to the request, and for some time the Academy of Music flourished most successfully, improving the taste and delighting the ears of the public. During the first few years it was under his direction, he composed not less

than thirty operas, such was the fertility of his genius, all of which were of great merit ; and everything seemed to add at once to his fortune and his fame.

These were the golden days of Handel's life ; his cup of prosperity was filled to the brim. It seemed indeed as if at this period he had not a single care to disturb the triumph of his success. He had royal favour, flourishing circumstances, fame, established character, the friendship of the first in worth, rank, and talent in the land ; and had full command of his time, to devote it to the cultivation of that art in which, even at this period, he excelled all of his own or any previous age. At length, however, since no man's prosperity is to be without some alloy here on earth, Handel, with all his greatness and all his reputation, was destined to feel the effects of that baneful spirit of "malicious envy," which superior excellence and superior advantages in another

" Make for ever sad."

This evil spirit took possession of two Italian composers, named Bononcini and Attilio, to whom Handel had been known in his youth, and who, till he rose into such notice and success, were themselves the stars of the ascendant in the musical hemisphere of London, amongst the patrons, the ladies, and the amateurs. On their great German

rival being appointed manager of the Italian Opera, when raised into the Academy of Music, these men could no longer endure his superiority, or the neglect of their own supposed claims to a much higher degree of merit. They had before been quarrelling with each other; but there is a sympathy in bad passions as well as in good ones, and these evil-minded Italians now made up their own difference, in order to combine together against Handel, in the hope to pull him down to their own level, calling him by no other name than the German intruder.

An attempt, however, was made on the part of the subscribers to the Academy and the leaders of fashion to restore unity, but by a scheme more calculated, one would think, to call forth a spirit of rivalry than to knit together the dissevered links of friendly combination. It was, that Bononcini, Attilio, and Handel, should severally exert their powers in the composition of one opera, each to take an act as his own share of the production; the story of Mutius Scævola was to be the subject; and with this agreement they all set to work. Handel had the third and last act allotted to him; and, even as it might have been foretold, he so completely distanced his rivals in his composition, that not a chance for them remained in the career of competition.

Those who had proposed this scheme of a patch-work kind of Opera (which, even had they all three been equals in talent, must have been incongruous), and who thought to conquer the envy of such mean minds as those of Bononcini and Attilio, by forcing on themselves the conviction of their own inferiority, with the hope thereby to secure for the future their submission and peace, knew little of the human heart when possessed by an evil passion towards a superior. Envy may be convinced, but it can never be appeased. This soon appeared. Handel, not to be driven from his ground by open measures, was speedily assailed with all the paltry manœuvres of subterfuge and intrigue. His noble nature, fretted and irritated, sometimes lost patience, and caused him to give vent to his anger by expressing in no very measured terms that contempt which his unworthy assailants so justly deserved. But *their* passions were shewn in the worst form of Italian hatred; a form which none but the base would have had recourse to—it was assassin-like, for it sought to aim a fatal wound by a covert blow.

At this period the nobility, generally speaking, were very ignorant of music; yet nevertheless (probably admiring most what they least understood) they were, as the essential supporters of the Academy, considered the chief judges of every new piece.

To these the two Italians addressed themselves; and persuading some silly leaders among them, that Handel was nothing better than a mere pretender, unfit to hold the place to which his German blood and a temporary success had raised him, they prevailed with them to shew their own superior judgment and independence, by doing all they could to oppose this redoubted rival's claims. Hence arose a renewed succession of vexatious circumstances, impertinences, and oppositions—for little minds, like little insects, have the power to teaze and to disturb, though not to inflict a mortal wound, by their small and venomous stings—which at last not only worried but so injured Handel, that having sustained by these cabals a considerable pecuniary loss, he became angry, and in disgust withdrew from Italians, Operas, and Patrons. His malignant opponents triumphed, and predicted that his hour was passed, his star fallen never to rise again. The very names of such insignificant men as Bononcini and Attilio (like the names of Amitus and Melitus, the persecutors of Socrates) would never have been known to posterity, had they not procured a record by means of the worst passions of their owners—the envy and jealousy of a truly great man.

Scarcely had Handel withdrawn, when he was so missed perhaps by those very persons who had

helped to drive him away, that an attempt was again made at accommodation, and for a while a hollow peace patched up between the contending parties. But as it sometimes happens in the quarrels of nations, as well as of individuals, a hollow peace becomes the means of a renewed war, even so was it now; and the Music Academy, instituted for the cultivation of harmony, became at length such a scene of discord, that it was altogether broken up.

The dissolution of the Academy had two results; the first was, an Opera set up by the nobility without the assistance of Handel; indeed in opposition to him. The second, that Handel in conjunction with Heidegger reöpened the theatre in the Haymarket, in rivalry of the aristocratic house; for three successive years, he there expended his money, laboured, and composed, for very little purpose; nor were the oppositionists at all more prosperous. His term of copartnership with Heidegger expiring, Handel, not at all disposed to quit the field from the want of success, framed a new plan, revisited Italy, collected together a new band of singers, and once more reöpened the Haymarket Theatre solely on his own account. But his good fortune was not much improved by this attempt, and his rivals were in no better luck,—it was evident the town would not support two Italian Operas. At length the nobility



managed to obtain the Haymarket house, and Handel went to Lincoln's Inn Theatre, and finally to Covent Garden, where he made an engagement with Rich, the patentee; but was still unfortunate. He composed operas, and exerted all his energies in the management and direction both of the orchestra and the singers, and for three more years laboured incessantly; but in vain. At the end of that period, he found nearly all his capital gone, his feelings deeply wounded by long-continued opposition and disappointment, his mind shaken in its vigour, and his right arm useless by a paralytic stroke.

After having in vain sought relief from the waters of Tunbridge Wells, he determined to try the vapour baths of Aix La Chapelle, by which he was speedily and perfectly cured. The day he went for the last time into the bath he felt so greatly recovered, that, impatient to satisfy himself the power of his right arm was restored, he hastened from it to the cathedral; and there performed in so astonishing a manner upon the organ, that some nuns, who happened to be present (they were probably nuns of charity in the strictest sense of the word, as, in their view, Handel was a heretic), declared he must have been cured by a miracle.

### PART III.

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IN 1736 Handel returned to England,\* the land of his greatest successes and his greatest trials: soon did he give further proof that his moral temperament was made for endurance. Having previously obtained the support of the Earl of Middlesex (afterwards Duke of Dorset), he made another effort at Covent Garden, composed operas, and renewed all his labours and vocations, but with no better success than he had heretofore experienced.

Injured, as we have seen, in his health, in his fortune, and in his peace of mind, his very genius questioned (at least by his enemies and those who took part with them), his labours decried, the former happy picture which his life presented seemed completely changed, in fact reversed; for many who had before courted now dropped him, as his patrons had once before done, for strangers and Italians more in fashion. Handel deeply felt these injuries; and, in taking

\* Handel became naturalised as a British subject in 1776.

shelter from the storms of the world that so rudely beat upon him, appears to have found in his devotional genius (and surely the term is not misapplied) that harbour of refuge, that repose, and ultimately that triumph, which religion—to whose services, in his sacred music, he now bent all the energies of his soul—never fails to convey as the only balm of the wounded spirit, from whatever cause its griefs may arise.

The treatment which Handel met with at various periods subsequent to his engagement with the Academy, in this country, must have been the more galling, as he could not but feel how deeply England was indebted to him for the improvement of her musical science. Handel's operas, though not the compositions on which his great fame has been so enduringly erected, were nevertheless infinitely superior to any before his day. He was also the composer who first broke through an established law, and dared to unite wind with stringed instruments. For this innovation he was severely censured; nor could he overcome the prejudice of custom till some time after, when his complete success, in his beautiful "Hautbois Concerto," refuted his critics, and established the wind instruments as a permanent and indispensable addition for an orchestra.

On his first arrival in England, the music at the

theatres was at the very lowest ebb, till Carey, who profited by Handel's operatic music, improved that for the English stage; and this improvement led the way for the appearance of *The Beggar's Opera*, originally written in ridicule of the Italian Opera, and in which several of the neglected and finest old airs, for melody and expression, were collected by Carey and revived.\*

It may here be remarked that Gay, following up the invective of Addison, though in a very different style, against the Italian Opera, for its violating nature (as more particularly illustrated in the absurdity of a hero dying singing), rather confirmed than otherwise the justness of the Italian taste for such dramatic pieces, and proved that, if not consonant to nature, they were not contrary to it. This is exemplified in *The Beggar's Opera*, by showing that the beauty and simplicity of good music (though applied to ordinary and sometimes to coarse words and sentiments) can accommodate

\* There is, perhaps, no example extant of a more admirable union of simplicity and pathos, than in the exquisite air of "*Can Love be controlled by advice?*" It is much to be desired that some modern poet would adapt new words to it, as those in *The Beggar's Opera*, from their coarseness, preclude any lady from singing it in a private circle. Another air is scarcely less delightful, "When he holds up his hand to plead for his life:" this is, I believe, as old as the time of Charles the First; it was then called "Ianthé the Lovely."

itself even to the lowest situations and circumstances of life, and therefore how much more so to the highest, with which it is more in unison, by being in itself so refined an art. The simple pathos of Polly's strains can call forth sympathy, even for her love for a highwayman on his way to "Tyburn tree;" how much more then can such feelings be roused for the elevated sorrows of the truly heroic, in their sufferings and their death!

There never was a greater mistake than when Gay thought finally to drive the Italian Opera from the stage, by giving to a burlesque the fascinations of some of the most melting airs and sweetest melodies that were ever heard.\* These, by the effects they produce in *The Beggar's Opera*, only serve to prove the omnipotence of music, since it invests with interest every station and degree over which it throws its spell, gives an air of tenderness and romance to Newgate lovers, and realizes, in sober sadness, what Swift said to Gay but in a jest—"that a Newgate pastoral would be a very pretty piece of pathos."

Besides Carey, the most eminent of Handel's contemporaries in musical science (all of whom profited by him) were Arne, Boyce, Haward, and

\* Carey and Gay may be said to have worked together, as one chose the music, and the other adapted his words to the airs.

latterly Croft. These were the authors of works that, with persons of true taste and judgment, have till the present day maintained their ground; and some of them are still well known to the public at large. But previous to Handel's time, the best compositions were confined alone to the church; and at the head of these stood the productions of that great master, Purcell. Yet though their merit was so considerable, they sunk into second-rate works on the appearance of the greater genius of Handel, when displayed in all its energy in his numerous sacred compositions.

Handel finally took leave of opera music in 1740. He was then in the fifty-sixth year of his age; and as *most* of his oratorios were subsequently composed, we find that his very greatest works were produced at a time of life when it is generally supposed genius has lost somewhat of its vigour, and that the best of the intellectual as well as the bodily powers of a man are on the decline. This may be the case with men of ordinary talent, but with those endowed with genius of a high degree it is otherwise. They frequently seem to be endowed with a perpetuity of youth, which, when not over-taxed by too violent and continued exertion, preserves the mind, and often the person, in a state of freshness and what the French call *verve*, that appears in some measure

to exempt them from the ordinary law of nature. Of the children of genius much will be required, for great to them indeed are the gifts of their bountiful Creator whilst here on earth.

During the time Handel resided with the Duke of Chandos at Cannons, he had composed a sacred piece, of which Pope and Arbuthnot are said to have written the words, called *Esther*. This was first performed by the youths of the King's Chapel, at the house of a Mr. Gates, in Westminster, in 1731, to the great delight of all who witnessed it.\* Handel now remembered this; and, recollecting also how great was the effect produced in Italy by compositions of a sacred character, he thought the same effects might be produced in England by similar means. Deeply impressed likewise with the grandeur of scriptural subjects, suited as the sublime poetry of the inspired writings was to the lofty conceptions of his own mind, he determined to try their effects on a London audience.

Indeed, the effects of such subjects had already been tried in England, as "*Athalja*" was performed at Oxford some years before, in the theatre of that university, at the celebration of a public act. Dr. Arne was present, and long after told Dr. Burney

\* *Esther* was also performed, at an early period, at the Academy of Ancient Music.

(who mentions it) that Handel presided at the organ, and opened on that instrument in a style which astonished every one; and, during the performance, extemporized with a depth and sublimity of harmony and modulation, and a power of execution, that neither himself nor any professional person in the assembly had ever heard equalled.

"*Esther*," "*Deborah*," and "*Athalia*" were the first three oratorios Handel brought out in London. These were followed by others, but for a long time with indifferent success, the expenses incurred by the composer far exceeding the receipts of the season.

At this period, the oratorios were acted: the characters appearing on the stage, and performing their several parts in recitative and song, exactly in the same manner as the actors do in an Italian Opera of our times. An attention to propriety of costume was unknown till the days of the great stage reformer, John Kemble; but something of costly attire, beyond the common dress of the day, or rather to combine with it, was attempted, as we may see in old theatrical pictures, and in Hogarth's inimitable scene of the players dressing in a barn. We can imagine, therefore, how strange and ludicrous it must have appeared to see Samson, or King Saul, in Handel's oratorios, going forth to battle



with a full-bottomed perriwig, the curls in goodly row, set in order on their heads, wearing a suit of Roman armour, with the baton of a field-marshal in their hands.

Amongst those compositions which were of an oratorical character, but never *acted* like a play on the stage, were the following: Dryden's "*Ode on St. Cecilia*," "*Alexander's Feast*," and "*L' Allegro*" and "*Il Penseroso*" of Milton. These, like the *Messiah*, having no individual character assigned to the several parts of recitative and song, of course were not of a nature capable of dramatic representation. To add to the attraction of these performances of poetic and sacred subjects, Handel was wont to delight the audience with playing, in his unequalled manner, on the organ, between the acts.

In the *Ode* of Dryden and the poems of Milton, Handel displayed a richness of harmony, a power of modulation, and of combining the several properties of music, so as to render all appropriate to the subject on which he worked in all its varieties, that was most astonishing. It is true there is much in these works that is best understood by the professed musician; but to the heart of feeling and the ear of taste, there needs not any profound knowledge to receive delight from the general effect of the composition; more especially from the ex-

pression that gives such power to the whole,—an expression which will ever be dwelt upon in memory as something truly wonderful. As an instance of this, may be cited the music of one song in the finest ode in our language, before referred to, "*Alexander's Feast* : "

"Revenge, revenge ! Timotheus cries ;  
See the furies arise,  
See the snakes that they rear,  
How they hiss in their hair,  
And the sparkles that flash from their eyes !  
Behold a ghastly band,  
Each a torch in his hand !  
These are Grecian ghosts, that in battle were slain,  
And unburied remain,  
Inglorious on the plain :  
Give the vengeance due  
To the valiant crew.  
Behold how they toss their torches on high,  
How they point to the Persian abodes  
And glittering temples of their hostile gods."

I know how difficult, nay, how almost impossible, it is to give those among my readers who have never heard the music of this well performed the least idea of its effects ; yet they are such as when but once heard can never be forgotten. The emphatic manner in which the

"Revenge, revenge ! Timotheus cries "

is given by Handel seems to rouse and brace every nerve for action. And then the

"See the Furies arise ! "

has in it something that in every chord, every note, conveys a feeling of terror mingled with awe. And how wonderfully expressive is the music of

“ See the snakes that they rear,  
How they hiss in their hair.”

But for force, character, and effect, where every solemn sound, every chord and discord in its modulation, gives the subject not only to the ear, but almost to the eye (by the influence it has upon the imagination), in that part of the composition which applies to the following words, Handel's genius is felt as a power strange and almost unearthly :—

“ Behold a ghastly band,  
Each a torch in his hand !  
These are Grecian ghosts, that in battle were slain,  
And unburied remain  
Inglorious on the plain.”

But who is there altogether insensible to the power of Handel ? Surely, no one. Who has not felt some emotions more than common stir the bosom, at the gradually unfolding grandeur of the *Coronation Anthem* ; or at the startling sublimity of “ *The Horse and his Rider*,” in *Israel in Egypt*, or the flowing and martial grace of “ *See the Conquering Hero comes* ;” the solemnity and awe of “ *The Dead March in Saul*,” or the more than earthly sweetness of the “ *Angels ever bright and fair*,” that no heart can resist ? These are all

popular, and all as familiarly known as Shakspeare's scene between Hamlet and the Ghost, or his "Seven Ages." There are many other compositions of Handel quite as striking, though fully to enter into their beauties requires perhaps a knowledge of music and an educated ear. "*If guiltless blood be your intent,*" in *Susanna*, may be cited as a song of this last description, where the opening, expressive of terror, weeping, and conscious innocence, awakens a sympathy that is really painful.

But not to dwell longer on the individual excellences of the oratorios of Handel, I need but say the whole was crowned by that work which, in its class, can alone be compared to Milton's "*Paradise Lost*," the MESSIAH.

The *Messiah*, whilst it stands as a lofty monument in proof of what excellence can be attained by study, perseverance, and industry, in the cultivation of native genius,—whilst it humbles the conceit of pretenders, and will keep in all due modesty rising merit,—stands also as a cheering encouragement to the meritorious, who are neglected or unfortunate; for that immortal work, as a whole unequalled even by Handel himself, now the admiration of nations, wherever the power of harmony is either known or felt, the *Messiah*, on its first appearance, was by the public unfavourably received!

Nor is this altogether so surprising as it might at first appear.

Sacred subjects, whether in prose, in poetry, in painting, or in music, when treated by a master-hand, have in them a grandeur and sublimity that is far above the common mind. Indeed, that mind requires the education which results only from repetition to be rendered capable of feeling their beauty. It is not a little remarkable that Milton's "*Paradise Lost*" and Handel's "*Messiah*," the two most sublime works on sacred subjects that comparatively modern times have produced, should both have been received coldly by the majority, on their production before the world.

In Handel's case, no master-mind, no, nor even inferior mind invested with the authority of patronage and fashion, took the lead in praise of the *Messiah*, or in pointing out its merits to the public—a public which, although it needed guidance, would yet, if guided aright, have soon been taught to feel its beauties by a repeated attendance at its performance, as it is one of those works which, like the compositions of Raphael, gradually unfolds its perfections, and becomes the more estimated by time and study. The music of the *Messiah* will enchain the ear, awaken the deepest feelings, and take possession of the whole soul, in a manner the most

absolute; and these effects, by every one who really studies this great work of Handel, will invariably be found never to diminish, but to increase with repetition.

It is painful to find by all accounts that have been handed down to us, that his ill success, more especially in reference to his *Messiah*, caused Handel to suffer from a return of his illness. But notwithstanding all his disappointments, he could not bring himself to think they were deserved. He had felt the power of his own *Messiah*, it dwelt upon his heart, and his own melodies sounded like the song of hope in his ear. He determined on another effort in the production of this favourite child of his genius before the world. He would try it in Dublin, where, at that period, there was a gay and brilliant court and a good-natured sensitive public. There were no Italian rivals in that city, no noble patrons deserving, as he had found so many of them in London, the ass's ears of Midas; there was every chance that he might have an impartial hearing and a fair field.

The great English satirist, Pope, who so well knew Handel, and who, though not fond of music, nevertheless regarded the composer as a friend, forgot not to give a place to the ill treatment he experienced in the *Dunciad*. Dullness is represented

by the satirist as listening to a miserable phantom, the Italian Opera, who thus addresses her :

“ But soon, ah soon, rebellion will commence,  
If music meanly borrows aid from sense :  
Strong in new arms, lo ! giant Handel stands,  
Like bold Briareus, with a hundred hands :  
To stir, to rouse, to shake the soul he comes,  
And Jove’s own thunder follows Mars’ drums,  
Arrest him, Dullness, or you sleep no more ;—  
She heard, and drove him to th’ Hibernian shore.”

It was a mark equally of good feeling and sound judgment in Handel, that his great work of the *Messiah*, in honour of Him who brought “ peace on earth, goodwill towards men,” should first be performed in Dublin for a purpose of mercy : he there brought it out for the benefit of the city prisoners for debt. Dr. Burney says : “ This act of generosity and benevolence met with universal approbation, as well as his music, which was admirably performed.” His success in Dublin completely changed the current of his fortunes ; for the amateurs and patrons of London found out that they had thrown away “ a gem richer ” than all that remained to them of the same class. Handel and his oratorios, and finally his *MESSIAH*, were heartily welcomed on their return to England ; and now it was difficult to say who most admired and lauded the *Messiah*, which but a brief space before they

had received with such entire apathy, if not disapprobation.

A remark of the excellent Dr. Burney on the *Messiah* is so just, that it should never be omitted in any notice of Handel. "This great work has been heard in all parts of the kingdom with increasing reverence and delight. It has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, fostered the orphan and the widow;" and, it may be added, to this day is the *Messiah* performed for the benefit of almost every charitable institution. To the Foundling Hospital alone it has been calculated to have produced more than ten thousand pounds, by various performances, most of them during the life of Handel, when he annually led the oratorio and directed the whole for the benefit of that charity. Thus the genius of Handel, consecrated as it was in all his great works to the honour of God, has been productive of the utmost benefit to man; and the MESSIAH, who came to heal the sick, sustain the poor, and to bind up the broken-hearted, has in this oratorio, founded on his divine history, and bearing his most holy name, been the continued means of giving forth blessings that have caused the hearts of the afflicted to leap for joy.\*

\* When the *Messiah* was first brought out, it was called, by way of distinction, *the Sacred Oratorio*, because every word in it was from Holy Writ.



Nor should it be forgotten, even in so slight a notice as this, that an elderly gentleman, who was a most intimate friend of the great composer, told Dr. Hayes (many years since the Musical Professor at Oxford) that, such was the generous and charitable disposition of Handel's mind, during a severe winter he sent the sum of *five hundred pounds* to the then Bishop of London, requesting his Lordship to direct the distribution of it in the most effectual manner, to relieve the poor and suffering of the metropolis. Throughout life Handel was noted for private acts of charity and feeling; and though, more especially when irritated by the opposition of ignorant patrons and pretenders in the Academy of Music, he was warm in his temper and rough in his manners, yet to the modest in merit, and to his friends in general, he was of a most kindly and even affectionate deportment.

Although the worldly fortunes of Handel were more prosperous in the latter years of his life, yet even as he had resembled Milton in experiencing neglect on the first production of his greatest work before the public, so did he likewise resemble him in the calamity of loss of sight—a calamity so fearful that none but those who have actually sustained it can probably fully estimate its appalling character. Light and the cheerful world “shut out,” dependent

on others for the common and necessary services of life, the blind are almost as helpless as the infant newly born into the world.

How must Handel, when old and blind, have felt the beauty and the pathos of his own matchless song, the "*Total Eclipse*," in the Oratorio of *Samson*! In our day, Braham gave it with a power and a feeling that drew tears from eyes that were blessed with sight, where hearts were found capable of pity for the bereaved of such a blessing. Poetry and music never show their capabilities more intensely than when they appeal to our bosoms with the sorrows of the blind. Handel's "*Total Eclipse*," as a work of genius, may, in its class, rank with Milton's lines where the poet alludes to his own loss of sight:

———" Thus with the year  
Seasons return ; but not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of eve or morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom or summer's rose,  
Or flocks or herds, or human face divine ;  
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me ; from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off ; and for the book of knowledge fair,  
Presented with a universal blank  
Of nature's works, to me expunged and razed,  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out."

What a picture, also, is that of Spencer, when speaking of a blind person :

———" Her mother blind  
Sate in eternal night ! "

A night that with Handel, the same as with Milton (and from the same cause, gutta serena), was destined never more to give place to "light" and "the cheerful day." His life now drew towards its close ; but when old, blind, depressed, and sinking under the slow decay of time and an over-worn spirit, he still persevered in that career he had long so arduously and so well sustained. Dr. Burney, with his accustomed good feeling, says, "To see Handel led to the organ after this calamity, at upwards of seventy years of age, and then conducted towards the audience to make his usual obeisance, was a sight so truly afflicting to persons of sensibility, as greatly to diminish their pleasure in hearing him perform." But one solace he had, which to the last never forsook him. Handel had been, even from a child, of a religious turn of mind. During the latter years of his life, and more especially when afflicted with blindness, all his thoughts seemed bent on a future state ; and he never failed attending daily the service of the church, both when in London or at Tunbridge Wells.

He continued his exertions in public till within a week of his death, when he who had gained

immortality (as far as he might in this life be said to do so) by his great work of the Messiah, now looking for a heavenly immortality through the mediation of that Saviour, expressed an ardent wish (which was as a prayer in the feeling that gave birth to it) that he might die on a GOOD FRIDAY; and on that very day, in the year of our Lord 1759, he was taken from this world to that kingdom where the angels, of whose choiring he had such heavenly conceptions, for ever rejoice in the presence of their Father and their God. Who can for a moment doubt that such greatly gifted and good men as Milton, Newton, and Handel have their appointed course in this world, for whose benefit they are sent on a more than ordinary mission to enlarge the understanding, to refine the mind, by the most useful and exalted means,

“ To raise the genius, and to mend the heart,”

to scatter roses on the path of life, which, though it may have many difficulties, still leads to heaven.

A public funeral was awarded to this highly gifted and good man. Dr. Pearce, Bishop of Rochester, performed the service, assisted by the choir of Westminster Abbey; where stands the great composer's monument, executed by the celebrated Roubilliac. It is finely imagined, and beautifully sculptured.

The figure of Handel is seen at full length, the head marked by strong character and expression. The sculptor, with equal truth and propriety, has placed in the hand of the composer a scroll of music, with the notes and words of—

“I know that my Redeemer liveth,”

that most angelic and touching song of all perhaps in the *Messiah*. What English heart but must expand with the feelings of gratitude and veneration at the tomb of Handel! I should not envy the mortal who could look upon it unmoved.

Nor can I conclude this imperfect sketch without adding a few remarks, which I trust will not be found either presumptuous or misplaced. God seems by his overruling providence to have designed that the great powers he bestowed on Handel, exemplified in his sacred works, should be exercised in England, and principally for the benefit of Great Britain. Nor is there any other nation on the whole face of the globe where they could have been employed to do so much good, and on so enlarged a scale; for is not England the land of charity? Has any other country so many institutions purely charitable? And from the time the *Messiah* was first performed for such a purpose, to the present day, have not the sacred compositions

of Handel (as Dr. Burney has so feelingly noticed) been constantly performed for the benefit of almost every charity throughout the three kingdoms ?

Without being unduly prejudiced in favour of my own country, I may say in respect to Handel, that, although born in Germany, he was best placed in England, since a man is ever best placed where he can do most good.



## THOUGHTS ON SACRED MUSIC;

SUGGESTED BY

THE HANDEL FESTIVAL, IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY, 1834.

### PART IV.

A CENTURY after the birth of Handel, in the year 1784, the first Commemoration of him was held in Westminster Abbey. This was patronized by that revered sovereign, George the Third; whose piety, probity, and feeling, the more his private character is considered, will become the more venerated by posterity.

George the Third had true taste in music as well as in literature. He it was who, at a time when this country seemed to have consigned to oblivion the writings of our old divines, knew and estimated their excellence. It was George the Third who, from the lips of that noble example of female dignity and genius, Mrs. Siddons, delighted to listen to Shakspeare and Milton. The same sovereign it was who founded and patronized the Royal Academy for British Artists, and also established the regular performance of the ancient music; and who felt with enthusiasm the transcendent powers of Handel.

A most touching anecdote of this worthy king may here be cited, concerning his state of mind in reference to Handel, after he was doubly afflicted, by loss of sight, and the yet greater calamity of mental aberration. These sufferings it is now known as a matter of history, towards the close of his life, confined him entirely to his apartments at Windsor.

The poor king retained his love of Handel's music almost to the last; and he would sit and listen to it (when it was occasionally played to him by some one, on an organ that stood in the chamber) with the most profound attention, whilst the tears would frequently roll down his cheeks as he did so. His mind, though wandering, and his feelings, though often sunk into apathy, were capable of being temporarily roused by the melody of his favourite composer. These strains, in such moments of reviving consciousness, must have visited our afflicted sovereign like the voice of an angel from heaven, who came to give him a foretaste of the happiness in store for him in that kingdom where his temporal crown would be exchanged for one that was eternal. He was, too, sometimes heard to address himself, as if in conversation with Handel; and not unfrequently he would sit down to the organ, and play some of the airs



in his favourite Oratorios of the "*Messiah*" and "*Samson*."

It was under the patronage of this royal and zealous admirer of the great master of harmony; that the first commemoration of him took place in the Abbey. The performances were continued for four days, and gave the highest satisfaction to all present. They were repeated annually, with increased power and extent (*and purely for purposes of charity*), till, the disturbed state of affairs in France having produced much agitation in this country, the public mind became so engrossed with such matters, that the spirit for indulging the finer feelings, in listening to the works of Handel, declined; and these performances were no longer sufficiently encouraged to warrant their continuance.

After so considerable an interval, the revival of a Commemoration of Handel was hailed with universal pleasure; and the grand musical festival was appointed to be held in the Abbey of Westminster, under royal patronage, during the summer of 1834.\*

Tuesday, June the 24th, was the day of the first performance. The morning was delightful, and the sun shone cheerily on the old Abbey towers and

\* The writer of this Sketch was present at all these concerts, except that of "*Israel in Egypt*," for which she unfortunately could not obtain tickets.

walls. On entering, the spectator commanded a full view of the raised orchestra; the organ, in the gothic style, richly painted and gilt, and all the accompaniments so well devised and ably executed. The majestic proportions of the building, the combination of strength and lightness in the columns and shafts, the noble sweep of the arches, the richness of the vaulted roof, and the fretwork of the architecture, altogether deriving considerable effect from the flowing draperies with which the seats were hung, rendered the interior striking. When the company and the performers were assembled, the *coup d'œil* presented a magnificent spectacle, that made the observer think of chivalrous times; of that assemblage of the nobles and the better classes of society, which so frequently took place within the walls of a gothic edifice on high days of festival and rejoicing.

The orchestra, situated in the nave of the building, ascending at the west end a few feet from the floor, to about the middle of the great window, surmounted by the beautiful gothic organ, afforded a convenient station for the performers, so that every one was in sight. The principal vocalists took their seats in the front; and the choruses filled the portion on either side, in the aisles, "tier above

tier," up to the very tops of the arches. Order and good arrangement everywhere prevailed.

But I may here remark, that many then present, who had witnessed the first Commemoration, thought, on the whole, the present inferior to it. Among these was the late lamented Earl of Mount Edgumbe. His Lordship's recollections of the former, in comparison with the latter Festival, reminded one of the elders of Jerusalem who wept as they called to mind the glories of the first temple, when they looked on the far inferior beauties of the second.\*

Some objections had been made to the Festival taking place in a cathedral; the same arguments have been urged against a similar sacred performance in a church. But a few observations, made without presumption, may, I trust, be offered on the question, that will not be altogether without weight with the candid and considerate reader.

The praiseworthy practice of a sermon preached, and money collected, for a charitable purpose in a church we all know to be common throughout the

\* Soon after the Festival of 1834, the late Earl of Mount Edgumbe published, in his "*Musical Reminiscences*," some account of it. The little volume named contains much curious and interesting information, relative to modern music and musicians.

realm. The Prayer-book sanctions, if the clergyman so wills it, that a very great portion of the service, and all the psalms, should be sung. In a cathedral all the service *is sung or chanted*, the organ accompanying. If, therefore, a performance of sacred music, *with the words of the vocal parts from Holy Writ*, takes place *for a charitable purpose* in a church, that must be a very strange mode of reasoning which can find it so widely different from a sermon preached for the same purpose,—that the last is commendable, and the former reprehensible.

It is true that our blessed Saviour drove the money-changers out of the temple; but wherefore? He knew them to be hypocrites, who, under the pretence of affording change for the coin of heavy money, to enable strangers to make their offering, carried on an usurious trade for their own sole benefit. Such he scourged from the holy place with indignation. But had they sat there to collect alms for the widow and the fatherless, the sick and the suffering, we are warranted in supposing our Lord would not only have let them alone, but would have pronounced their work blessed. Be it remembered, the performance of Handel's "*Messiah*," and many other sacred pieces of music, has often done this blessed deed of charity in a church.

It has been held by some as wrong that public

singers are on such occasions employed. God gave those public singers their voices ; and a happy thing it is for themselves, and often for others, when they have the opportunity to raise them to His honour and His glory. Is it not an argument, and a wise one, that the best of everything should be offered to God ? Shall we then allow the almost ludicrous pitch-pipe and wretched singing of a village choir, and deny the finest voices in the land the opportunity to sing their Maker's praise ? David and Solomon, who collected together the choicest singers of Israel for the service of the Temple, should, by their example, teach us better.

Finally I would ask, where else could the "*Messiah*," founded on the history of the Redeemer, and with the words selected from Scripture, be so well or so fitly chanted as in a sacred edifice, surrounded by a Christian people, assembled together with order and decorum, and accompanied by that reverential feeling which is called forth within the walls of a gothic building, where all is favourable to the most solemn impressions ? "Whatsoever is harmoniously composed," says the author of the *Religio Medici*, "delights in harmony ; which makes me much distrust the symmetry of those heads which declaim against church music." In like manner may we say, we should doubt the true de-

votion of that spirit which could feel none on hearing the *Messiah* performed within any building; how much more then must it be felt in its high and holy character, when heard within the ancient and consecrated walls of Westminster Abbey!

Martin Luther was so sensibly impressed with the benefit of sacred music, that he not only encouraged it, but, as it is universally known, composed it himself. He says of the science generally: "Next to Theologie, I give the highest place to music. For thereby all anger is forgotten; and melancholy, and many other tribulations and evil thoughts, are expelled: it is the best solace for a sad and sorrowful mind."\*

It was a gratifying sight to look on the royal party;—to see the king and the youthful successor to his crown, the Princess Victoria, now our gracious and beloved sovereign, thus seated in the Abbey, the most venerable and historical building in the kingdom, surrounded by so many of the people, to

\* Burton, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, seems to have borrowed these ideas of Luther, when he says—"Divine music, besides that excellent power it hath to expel many other diseases, is a sovereign remedy against despair and melancholy." He further says, when speaking of the power of music, "And Elisha, when he was troubled by importunate kings, called for a minstrel, and when he played, the hand of the Lord came upon him."

attend a commemoration of Handel, in the performance of some of his greatest works.

As the King, the Queen, the Princess, and the court came in, all rose from their seats. I was struck with the very impressive effect the rising of a multitude in silence produced. No applause, no greeting, could be given in a building dedicated to the service of the King of kings. But the gentle stir, the instant change of position in so many hundred persons, governed by one impulse, and rising with the exact order of one movement, as if all were of one body, had an effect truly majestic.

This rising of the multitude from their seats in honour of the presence of the King, was instantly followed by the burst of the *Coronation Anthem*. The organ with its deep peal, the perfect union of the various instruments, the roll of the double-drums, the blast of the trumpet, and the swell of the choruses,—some as if breathing forth the lower and deeper tones of earth, and others as if choiring in heaven,—rose, in their mighty concord of “sweet sounds,” through the vaulted edifice of other times, and shook its old roof and its aisles with all the power of Handel’s sublimest harmony.

There is, perhaps, no language so universal as that of music, or compounded of such simple means, capable of such great effects. There are but seven

notes. Strike any one of those seven separately, and though alone it has a pleasing sound, but possessing no distinct expression. Combine them, vary them, by the innumerable changes of which they are capable,—bring them into harmonious chords,—involve them in the mazes of modulation, from the major to the minor, from the simple plaintive air to the brilliant allegro or the pensive adagio,—and there is not a passion of the soul, but music, in a very great degree, will harmonize with it, and by so doing will touch the most hidden feelings of the heart. It has an eloquence which no other language possesses; for it is universally felt. The matchless genius of Handel never before struck me so forcibly as it did on the first day's performance at Westminster Abbey. In that grand *Coronation Anthem Chorus* there occurs a change so surprising, that it seems of more than earthly harmony,—that from the full peal to the thrilling passage, which, in its effects, runs through every nerve of the human frame,—“*May the King live for ever.*” Who can hear it without a chill? In its effect there is not perhaps a more powerful passage in Shakspeare himself, even when delivered by a Siddons, than in Handel's “*May the King live for ever.*”

After this anthem, on the first day, followed Haydn's Oratorio of the *Creation*,—a beautiful and



delightful composition. Yet even Haydn's *Creation* bowed down before the mighty genius of Handel, and seemed inferior; when, on the opening of the third part of the concert, a selection from the Oratorio of *Samson* was performed. Compared to the great master of sacred song, similar works of other composers appear more like those intended for some tragic opera than for a church. In harmony they want his simple grandeur; and above all are they wanting in the pealing fullness and sublimity of his choruses. Yet (I still speak of *sacred* music only) listen to Mozart or Haydn, and you are delighted; and find no fault. But let Handel follow, and you feel his superiority; yet you scarcely know how to define it, or to say in what it precisely consists. It is the result of a feeling above the language of criticism, and not to be expressed by its rules; because it emanates from the power of a genius, which, in one branch of the art, never had an equal, and cannot be subjected to general laws. How just, therefore, is the opinion of the author of the *Musical Reminiscences*, that it is neither effective nor judicious to mingle the sacred works of these several great masters with the compositions of Handel, and in so marked a manner, in the same festival.

## PART V.

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No one who was in the Abbey on the first day's performance can ever forget the *Dead March in Saul*, as it was played by the full orchestra. The majestic effect of this sublime composition for the burial of the dead, its dirge-like plaintiveness, mingled with awe, are all of a nature to search the deepest feelings of the heart, and to lead the mind to pause on the solemnity of death, and the helplessness of mortality. So admirably was this march performed, that the most profound attention prevailed; scarcely did the listening multitude appear to draw their breath freely, lest they should interrupt the sad and flowing melody of that mournful music.

Of our great and now lamented English vocalist, the author just named thus spoke on this occasion: "Braham has long been at the head of his profession as an English singer,—so long, that it is marvellous he can be so still. He is now far

advanced in life, yet he retains in their full extent all his powers, without diminution or decay. His voice is just what it was in his prime ; it has become neither weak, nor husky, nor tremulous, but filled with its volume all the vast space with the finest effect. His singing too was most excellent, with the most perfect taste and judgment throughout. *Recitative* is not congenial to the English language, and very few purely English singers understand it. Most of them, especially the female, fall into a great error respecting it. They seem to consider it as an *air*. The Italians never talk of *singing* it, but call it *reciting* ; and so it is and ought to be. It is not melody, it is noted declamation ; and the first object is, not to warble it into an air, but to deliver the words with distinct articulation, sensible *expression*, proper emphasis, and with just *punctuation*, if I may so call the necessary pauses for taking breath, which are like so many commas. In short, it should be assimilated as nearly as possible to good declamation. To lengthen it out by slow delivery is as wearisome as the dull recitation of a bad actor, orator, or reader. Those who wish to avoid these defects could not have a better lesson than from Braham."

In the *Samson* (forming the last part of the first concert), except the choruses, which were all fine,

the most impressive solos were the songs, "*Honour and Arms*," by Phillips, and Braham's "*Total Eclipse*." The expression of sorrow, of despair for the loss of sight, with a consciousness of native though fallen greatness, which he threw into his delivery of this, was truly wonderful. And in his "*Deeper and deeper still*," as you listened, you forgot all else; and the father, the victim of his own rash vow—Jephthah—seemed alone present; whilst all the struggles occasioned by the love of his devoted daughter, and his duty to God, divide and rend his soul.

On the third day, the first part consisted of a selection from *Judas Maccabeus*, in which Braham gave the warlike song of "*Sound an Alarm*," in a manner the most soul-inspiring,—enough to rouse the heart of a coward to become brave in a righteous cause.

The *Messiah* was performed on the last day. To speak in detail of what, as a whole, is very generally considered not only the grandest work of Handel, but of all compositions in music, would be as unnecessary, as it is impossible to convey an adequate idea of its merits by description. The *Messiah*, being adapted to portions of Scripture in the English translation, is of no disadvantage to it. Indeed, I doubt if any other language would so

well have suited with the spirit of the composition, though the composer was a German. The Scriptures are allowed by all biblical critics to be the only writings in the world (and what a mark is it of their superiority, of their divine inspiration) that will bear a literal translation. How admirably this has been done in the English version needs no comment. The strength, the euphony, and the simplicity of every sentence accords to perfection with the character of Handel's strains. Nothing but English words could be desired for them.\* There is not one air, not one chorus, throughout the whole, but is in itself perfect. True it is, one more than another may strike the fancy according to the subject; but every part is appropriate, and would not admit of alteration or change; for the sound is in accordance with the sense and the expression.

As an instance of this, may be cited the sacred song, "*There were Shepherds abiding in the Fields.*" It opens with a recitative. Nothing can be more simple than the notes given for the vocalist, and the accompanying chords are of the same character; yet it is a simplicity entirely appropriate to the subject, and of the utmost sweetness. It is, as it ought to be, pastoral, and conveys to the mind the picture (if

\* Great praise is due to the clergyman who selected the words for the *Messiah* of Handel—Dr. Morell.

I may be allowed the phrase) of those shepherds of Israel observing their watch amid the calmness and stillness of the night; and in the last notes of the recitative there is something so exquisitely melodious, that you are prepared for what immediately follows—the appearance of the angel. Then how beautifully come those few bars which form the symphony; and how characteristic is the continuation, with the words, “And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.” Then follows in an elevated and commanding strain, suited to the grandeur of the mission that brings the angel to announce to the shepherds the birth of the Saviour of the world, “And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

None but Handel could have composed the simple and sublime passages which he did for those words. And the accompaniment, marvellous in the originality of its conception, which follows immediately after this, with the thrilling notes that announce the multitude of the heavenly spirits who appear, in a moment, to bear witness to the announcement of the angel—“And suddenly there

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was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying." Then comes the full and magnificent burst of the chorus, as if all the myriad of the "heavenly host" at once took up the strain, with "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, goodwill towards men."

In this one portion of the *Messiah* all the varied excellencies of Handel's genius are displayed with a suitableness to the subject, and a power and strength of expression, that was never surpassed, even by himself. Indeed, in Handel there is a power to act in a most absolute manner on the human mind. The strains of the *Messiah* can calm disturbed thoughts, and lull to rest anxious cares; and the spirit becomes raised to holiness, to devotional hope and confidence, by the harmonies of his more than earthly melodies.

The choruses were all fine, more especially those of "*Unto us a child is born,*" the "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates!*" and "*All we like sheep have gone astray;*" the whole being crowned by that most magnificent chorus, "*Worthy is the Lamb.*" This last was most admirably performed: all present rose from their seats in reverence to the subject, and seemed to unite in praise, as one impulse, and that truly devotional, swayed every heart in the "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power to Him that

sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

Some who have even a profound knowledge of music object to Handel, the extreme simplicity of all his movements, and his want of that refined and improved science which is the result of later years and of more recent studies amongst our composers. But this very objection, made by some to Handel, seems to me a thing in his favour. Who would wish that Shakspeare had lived when the English tongue was other than it was in his day, when strength and simplicity were its characteristics? It is the same with Handel. The simplicity of the science, or of the materials of his art, preserved all its force; he was not tempted (as he might have been in these days of executive difficulty and involved science in music) to lose one jot of his sublimity. Handel had always *air* in all his compositions; however full, however rich, still *air* was predominant. It is the *air* which leads on the movement; it lingers on the ear, it is never forgotten or lost in variations or intricacy: nothing is done for the display of science or difficulty, but everything for feeling and expression.

Since the Commemoration of 1834, the Sacred Harmonic Society have done much, and with such success, to improve the national taste for the highest



order of musical composition, that they merit every mark of grateful acknowledgment that a British public can bestow on them. By their great and praiseworthy exertions, Handel has already become the delight of thousands. His immortal works now not only charm a congregated multitude, but produce the happiest effects on individuals. Young persons, who (whether they have much or little talent) spend so many of the golden hours of their youth in learning music, may find, by what they hear at Exeter Hall, that it is better to study good than bad music; and the more they practise the good, the less will they tolerate the bad. If Handel is of too high an order to begin with in the education of taste, there are many excellent masters open to them, who will lead them on till they are able to appreciate the more august and solemn beauties of sacred music, such as the *Messiah*. In every pursuit it is well to accustom the young student to learn that which has the power to refine the taste and exalt the feelings, rather than to enervate them. A young lady's taste in the fine arts is often a tolerable indication of the character of her mind.

To the honour of our ancestors be it spoken, from very early times, all the fine arts, all those which called forth the industry of man, and encouraged the noblest efforts of human genius, were

employed in the service of the church. Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music, Eloquence,—these, a lovely and a sister band, congregated around the church, and acknowledged her as the mother from whose fostering bosom they sustained life and being. The perfection to which the care and support of ecclesiastical buildings brought these arts, may to this day be seen in the enduring splendour of such edifices. The genius of a Michael Angelo and a Raphael was raised to the highest point of excellence by being employed for the church; for in nothing were they so admirable as in their sacred works and subjects; and all the arts of the middle ages, on examination, will be found to have flourished in proportion to the patronage they received from religion. Even the art of war did so; witness the Crusades, the Order of the Knights Templars, and of chivalry generally, which, however abused, was religious in its origin. Music owed its very being to the church, for it formed an indispensable and a most impressive part of divine service, founded not on tradition alone, but on the authority of Scripture, in the New as well as in the Old Testament; for the Apostles themselves sang hymns.

There is in music, sacred music more especially, a spirit that is so holy, we cannot doubt Providence

designed it to help on His own good work for the salvation of men. It softens and expands the heart, and makes it yearn in kindly feelings towards its fellow-pilgrims in the journey of life. As Luther intimates, it stills perturbed thoughts, and raises them to heaven; preparing the inward man for the hour of meditation, of prayer to his Maker. It expressed the joy of David in his triumphant hour, as he went before the ark of the Lord; it soothed the dark spirit that came over Saul, and was employed to invoke the good angel which inspired the heart of Elisha in his prophetic mood. The music of devotion is an offering of earthly harmony to Him who is the author of all harmonies,—who sustains that of all created things. In what place then can it be so appropriately introduced as in a church? In the holy fane within whose walls our fathers knelt, and our mothers vowed; and where we were ourselves borne to the font of baptism in their maternal arms,—where we have prayed with our kindred and our friends, and where our earthly remains will be carried to the service of the burial,—there may we most effectually listen to those strains that faintly typify and shadow forth the purity, the melody of heaven,—the songs of spirits, in whose community we may one day hope to dwell.

To improve the taste of the national music of our

churches (and Handel has become national) cannot fail to be attended with the most salutary effects. As a taste for good music becomes more and more universally diffused throughout the land, it is to be hoped (as in Italy and Germany) that in almost every town may be found a certain number of persons sufficiently cultivated in the science, by an attention to it in their leisure hours, to learn to sing the psalms in tune, and even to execute the parts as they ought to be sung in Handel's choruses. To do this would not occupy more time, under the direction of a judicious organist or leader, as the singers met together to practise in the church, than many inhabitants of the country towns now often give to idleness or folly. And how different would be the result!—the psalmody of the country churches would become, what it ought to be, a most impressive part of the divine service. \*

\* Hullah's system, of late years, has been introduced with great success in several of the large towns of England; and, in addition to Handel's, the works of Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn, Mendelssohn, &c., have been produced in the most admirable manner at Exeter Hall. In February 1849 an account was given in the newspapers, that Signor Costa had revived Handel's marvellous Oratorio of "*Israel in Egypt*," having, contrary to the custom of the last century, determined to give this work entire, exactly as Handel himself intended it should be performed. Hitherto it had been usual to introduce several songs from other compositions, which, breaking the succession of choruses, marred entirely the author's design. The genius and judgment of Costa

The manners and morals of the lower orders would be more likely to be improved than otherwise; for it cannot be doubted that, in these days of universal education, the more innocent and reasonable and agreeable are the nature of the pursuits thrown in the way of the humbler classes, the more likely will they be to remain, or to become, good and peaceable subjects and citizens.

Thus then we may hope that in process of time all men, though far distant from the Metropolis, will be enabled, more or less, according to their capacity and feeling, to estimate the surpassing genius of Handel; and England will no longer be censured by foreigners, for a want of musical taste amongst the great body of her people; whilst to them may return, "as in the elder time," that spirit for music, which Collins, in his fine Ode, invokes as—

" Warm, energetic, chaste, sublime ! "

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led him to discard all these interpolations, and to produce the Oratorio according to the composer's impressive design. This he accomplished with the most perfect success. But the public seem not to be aware that the same thing was done, not by the will of the conductor, but *by the express desire of George the Third*, at the Festival in the Abbey, of 1784.

THE END.

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.





